Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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2007-02951/

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Log Number: 07-03-11
Week of January 15, 2007

SANITATION VIDEO LATEST SERVICE FROM FOOD CENTRE

Food processors in Saskatchewan will have some help in keeping their facilities clean, well-sanitized and safe for production.

The Saskatchewan Food Industry Development Centre has released a training video, entitled "Sanitation – A Defensive Approach," which provides important information to people in the food processing sector.

Carmen Ly, Communications Director for the Food Centre, says the project has proven to be very relevant to the industry. "Food safety has been a big issue in the food industry of late. We've had recent events like the E. coli contamination of spinach from the United States, as well as some other product recalls in the past few months. So the issue is on the minds of consumers, and on the minds of manufacturers," she said.

"Proper cleaning and sanitation is a key step in reducing the risk of contamination of food products during processing, and that's what our video is squarely aimed at. We found that the industry was very interested in this kind of training, especially smaller companies."

Ly said the Food Centre wanted to make the video as comprehensive as possible to cover a wide variety of sanitation issues facilities might face. "It covers the appropriate steps to properly clean your plant to ensure there is no risk of contamination in your food products while manufacturing. It also deals with the appropriate usage of chemicals in the cleaning process. The video will assist processors in training their staff in proper plant sanitation to ensure the production of safe food."

The video was developed through funding support from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF). As a result, the Food Centre is able to make it available to Saskatchewan food processors free of charge. Processors interested in obtaining a copy can contact the Food Centre at (306) 933-7555, or by e-mail at info@foodcentre.sk.ca.

The video is just the latest service offered by the Food Centre to assist the food processing industry in the province. The centre was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1997, as a partnership between SAF, the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Food Processors Association.

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This partnership has brought together a wealth of experience and expertise in a broad variety of areas, which the Food Centre has been able to deliver to the food industry. In fact, Ly says the agency can help food processors with almost any aspect of their operations, from the moment they come up with a product idea to the moment they begin operating their own plant.

"Our main focuses are product development, interim processing and industry training," she explained. "We provide technical support to help clients with the research and development of new product ideas, production processes and such. We assist them with packaging options, nutritional labeling and sensory evaluation of products. Through our partnership, we provide business development support in terms of regulations, costing, marketing and getting into the retail aspect."

The Food Centre has proven to be particularly valuable in assisting smaller entrepreneurs and start-up companies take their product ideas from the page to the store shelf. It can serve as an incubation-type facility that can get the products manufactured on a small scale for test-marketing, then pass the manufacturing duties back to the producers when they are ready to graduate to their own facilities.

One of the clients using the Food Centre's services is Sandy Purdy, owner and operator of Prairie Berries Inc. in Keeler. The Food Centre is currently helping her to develop and test a dried saskatoon product. Purdy says that, without the Food Centre, many small businesses like hers wouldn't stand a chance of taking their product concepts to the next level. "Who do we have, resource-wise, to help us develop these ideas and thoughts? I'm certainly not trained in food science, so I don't have the technical knowledge; nor do I have the equipment or facilities to test these ideas," she stated.

"The people in the Food Centre are just a wealth of knowledge, and when they don't have the knowledge, they'll do the research to help us find the information we need to move forward. They work on my project with the same heart that I give to it, so I just can't speak highly enough of this resource that we have here in Saskatchewan."

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BEEF SYMPOSIUM ARMS PRODUCERS WITH LATEST RESEARCH

Cattle producers attending the upcoming Saskatchewan Beef Symposium have a terrific opportunity to learn about issues and opportunities currently facing the beef industry, as well as those that are on the horizon.

The conference is being held February 7 and 8 in Saskatoon. It is co-sponsored by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, the University of Saskatchewan and the Western Beef Development Centre.

Dr. John McKinnon, a professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the U of S and the Saskatchewan Beef Industry Chair, is one of the conference organizers. He says the symposium's steering committee has developed a program that will not only share leading-edge research on beef industry issues with producers, but will also assist them to incorporate new found best practices into their cattle operations.

"The four partners co-sponsoring the symposium are bodies that are charged with either conducting beef cattle research, or are in the extension field working with producers to help them adopt technology into their production practices," McKinnon said. "So we're working together to provide the latest findings to producers so that they can incorporate them into their operations, both for their own benefit and for the overall well being of the Saskatchewan beef industry."

The symposium will discuss topics such as: Beef Production in the Information Age; Growing Saskatchewan's Feeding Sector; Saskatchewan's Competitive Advantage in the Cow-Calf Sector; and Grazing and Wintering Beef Cows.

"We've designed the symposium to accomplish two things. Our first goal is to get the most up-to-date research results out to producers. A second goal is to focus producers' attention on areas of the industry that are active and growing, and have the possibility for expansion," McKinnon said.

He noted that these two goals of research and expansion are intertwined throughout this year's program, and cited the discussion on cow-calf operations as an example. "We think there's a tremendous opportunity to grow Saskatchewan's cow-calf sector. So we have a session that looks at the competitive advantages of the cow-calf sector. Then we follow that up with the latest research on grazing and winter management for beef cows that will help producers make the most of these opportunities."

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McKinnon also indicated that the conference focuses not only on issues producers encounter on their farms today, but also on those they are likely to face in the future. "Two major initiatives in the beef industry are age verification and electronic identification of animals," he said. "Our very first session looks at the opportunities that tracing information on animals will provide to producers: how it will open new markets for them, and what technology is going to be available to accomplish this. So we think that session is very applicable to what producers will face in the next five years."

While researchers and technical experts will be prominent on the symposium agenda, McKinnon noted that many of the conference speakers will actually be producers. In this manner, cattle producers can hear directly from their colleagues in the Saskatchewan beef industry who are putting these techniques and technologies into practice.

McKinnon feels the symposium will be valuable for anyone associated with the sector, be it cow-calf producers, producers integrated with forage operations, or backgrounding and finishing operations. "We think that all of these different aspects of the industry will be able to gain some information from this conference and be able to take something home that they can apply to their operations, and hopefully improve their economic competitiveness," he noted.

Anyone interested in learning more about the Saskatchewan Beef Symposium can download the conference brochure from the Western Beef Development Centre website at www.wbdc.sk.ca, or contact Dr. John McKinnon at the U of S at (306) 966-4137.

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NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN FOR NEW ROSEMARY DAVIS AWARD

Canadian women involved in agriculture should apply now in order to be considered for the new Farm Credit Canada (FCC) Rosemary Davis Award. Producers are also welcome to submit a nomination on behalf of a woman in agriculture who they think deserves recognition.

"FCC is proud to announce this award that recognizes innovative women in agriculture who demonstrate a passion for the industry and serve as role models," said John Ryan, FCC President and CEO. "We are committed to agriculture and want to highlight the industry as a viable career option for women."

The five award winners will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to participate in the 2007 ATHENA International Conference in Chicago. The conference focuses on building strong leadership skills and provides networking opportunities for women.

"The FCC Rosemary Davis award also honours Rosemary Davis, Farm Credit Canada's first female board chair and a successful agribusiness owner and operator," said Ryan.

A nominee can be any woman who leads in Canadian agriculture and makes the industry stronger and more diverse. Nominations can be submitted using the online form available on the FCC website. Chris Clemett with FCC Public Relations has a few suggestions for getting through the nomination process smoothly.

"First, take a look at the eligibility guidelines and the rules and regulations on our website," said Clemett. "I suggest that people print out the questions in advance and go through them on paper. It will save them time later on if they fill out a rough draft before completing the official form online."

The nomination form requires complete information about the nominee (full name, mailing address, employer), as well as written sections on the nominee's background, and a short section about her contribution to agriculture.

Clemett also reminded potential nominees that the deadline to send applications is fast approaching. Nominations through the online process close at midnight on Thursday, February 1, 2007.

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Five recipients for the Rosemary Davis Award will be selected from across Canada. They will be announced by March 1.

Anyone with questions about the award or the application procedure should contact FCC at 1-888-332-3301, or by e-mail at prixrosemaryaward@fcc-fac.ca.

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For more information, contact:

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Log Number: 07-03-14
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LANDOWNERS CO-OPERATING TO PROACTIVELY MANAGE WEEDS

Every farmer and rancher is familiar with the trouble caused by weeds. Leafy spurge and other aggressive, invasive exotic plants represent serious threats to the productivity and profitability of many agricultural operations and wildlife habitats. An invasive weed can reduce the market value of land, degrade zoning capacity and devastate wildlife habitat.

Some invasive plants can also reduce the lifespan of man-made structures such as roads and rail lines. When the deep-penetrating roots of perennial plants like leafy spurge or spotted knapweed burrow into the normally impermeable road or rail bed, channels are left through which water can seep and cause premature degradation.

Ignoring or putting off dealing with invasive plant problems will simply result in the spread of the weed, and ultimately add to the time and cost required to contain and control the plant and recover lost productivity/habitat. For example, if herbicide is the control method of choice, delaying application can mean a ten-fold or even hundred-fold increase in the amount of herbicide required. This will result in increased costs and increased herbicide-loading in the environment, in addition to the damage done by the plant up to that point.

But a unique approach being tried in southwestern Saskatchewan may become a model for proactive weed management by facilitating co-operation among landowners in combating the spread of invasive plant species.

The Frenchman River-Wood River Weed Management Area (WMA) was established in 2005 across seven rural municipalities and the Grasslands National Park, which have similar habitats and share pathways of invasion that make the territory particularly susceptible to the spread of aggressive plants like leafy spurge or spotted knapweed.

Sue Michalsky, a rancher and board member of the WMA, says it is believed to be the first of its kind on the Canadian prairies, although these bodies are more common in the United States.

"A WMA is a clearly defined land area based on characteristics such as similar geography, topography, weed species, climate or land usage," Michalsky said. "Its size and shape are determined by natural and logical boundaries that influence where specific types of weeds reproduce and spread."

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Since weeds are not limited by arbitrary man-made boundaries, neither are management areas. They can coincide with a broader watershed region, or cut across several municipalities, as is the case with the Frenchman River-Wood River WMA. In fact, since this particular zone borders Montana, plans are even being developed to partner with similar WMAs south of the border to prevent weeds from spreading in either direction.

"This reflects the reality that a land manager's or producer's success in combating an invasive weed species is generally not determined by his or her own efforts alone. It requires a co-operative, concerted approach before the spread of a weed can truly be controlled," said Michalsky.

Weed management areas offer many advantages as a vehicle for weed management efforts. Rather than a year-by-year approach to weed control, Michalsky says management areas emphasize a long-term plan for combating the problem. They enable local landowners to establish priorities; emphasize particular threats; pool talents and resources; share information; communicate with the general public; deliver educational programs; assess risks to local water sources, crops and endangered species; and help to secure more stable funding for long-term management efforts.

The Frenchman River-Wood River WMA received funding from Environment Canada's Invasive Alien Species Partnership Program to assist with weed prevention, detection and control programs. Additional funding will be provided by the Grasslands National Park and the participating municipalities. It is expected the project will also be able to access technical support from other existing initiatives, such as the Greencover Canada program, administered by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and the Invasive Plant Program, delivered jointly by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities and funded under the Agri-Environmental Group Planning Program of the Agriculture Policy Framework Environmental Chapter.

Business is now picking up for this southwest WMA. The group recently hired a co-ordinator, Julie Mackenzie, and will soon engage in public consultations. Land managers within the RMs of Val Marie, Old Post, Waverley, Mankota, Glen McPherson, Wood River and Pinto Creek will have an opportunity to learn more about this innovative project in February, when a series of public meetings will be held. More information will be made available in the coming weeks.

SAF encourages groups to try the Weed Management Area concept. Anyone interested in finding out more about WMAs can contact the SAF Weed Control Specialist, Clark Brenzil, at 306-787-4673.

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Log Number: 07-03-15
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"COWS, GRASS AND CASH" SET TO BE DISCUSSED IN YORKTON

The agenda is set and plans are being finalized for Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's annual "East Central Beef and Forage Seminar," taking place January 25 in Yorkton.

"Producers in the east central region can look forward to an event where they learn, share and renew their awareness regarding management practices, new technologies and production issues," said Jodie Horvath, SAF Livestock Development Specialist.

Horvath says this year's theme, "Cows, Grass, and Cash," promises to deliver valuable insights to producers in areas such as improving the profitability of their operations and understanding the impact of environmental programming on the Canadian cattle industry.

SAF Livestock Development Specialist Naomi Paley said, "The seminar will feature discussion on timely topics such as winter feeding of livestock. The presentations will tie in management strategies such as lowering the cost of production, reducing work load and increasing profit."

The program will also include presentations on the latest research results related to cattle operations. For example, the afternoon sessions will focus on feeding options for extensive winter grazing, and introduce some new findings from the Western Beef Development Centre. Dr. Bart Lardner will share some of the recent data from a swath grazing trial involving feeder animals rather than cow-calf pairs.

The event is also an opportunity for producers to get an update on environmental programs such as the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program, and to meet the individuals who are delivering it in their area. The program offers technical and financial support to producers who are looking to improve their management practices.

The day will be capped off with a panel of producers, who will share their experiences in using low-cost feeding methods in their cattle operations.

"Having the producers share their experiences is a great way to wrap up the seminar," said Horvath. "It really validates the research that is ongoing and the management principles we promote. Producers are able to hear directly from their colleagues who are trying these same approaches in their own operations, which usually generates some good discussion and a lot of interesting questions."

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People attending the seminar will also get the chance to visit booths and displays, and to mingle with other producers.

The event is held in co-operation with Yorkton Agricultural Information Inc., a non- profit corporation dedicated to promoting agricultural information that will benefit area producers.

The seminar will take place at the St. Gerard's Parish Complex. The cost to attend is $15, including lunch, if delegates pre-register by January 16, or $20 at the door.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information or registering for the East Central Beef and Forage Seminar can call Jodie Horvath at the SAF Regional Office in Yorkton at (306) 786-1509.

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